United Nations E/ICEF/2001/P/L.44

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: Limited
20 November 2000

Original: English

For information

United Nations Children's Fund
Executive Board
First regular session 2001
22-26 and 29 January 2001
Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

Country note**

Lebanon

Summary

The Executive Director presents the country note for Lebanon for a programme of cooperation for the period 2002 to 2006.

The situation of children and women

1. Lebanon has achieved most of the goals of the World Summit for Children. The infant mortality rate (IMR) and under-five mortality rate (U5MR) have steadily declined to 28 and 32 per 1,000 live births, respectively (Pan-Arab Programme for Children Survey, 1996), with no significant gender disparity. National immunization coverage is 96 per cent, and no cases of polio have been recorded since 1994. Most national nutrition goals have been achieved for both boys and girls. Nearly all pregnant women have access to prenatal care and trained attendants during childbirth. Ninety-eight per cent of children age 6 to 11 are at school, with no gender disparities, and 91 per cent of children aged 3 to 5 are enrolled in pre-schools and childcare programmes. National surveys show a decline in illiteracy rates from 16 per cent in 1990 to 12 per cent (16 per cent for women) in 1996.

2. Yet a number of challenges remain. Neonatal mortality represents 75 per cent of infant deaths, indicating problems in the quality of maternal health services and newborn care. Some 27 per cent of women of reproductive age and 25 per cent of

* E/ICEF/2001/2.

** An addendum to the present report containing the final country programme recommendation will be submitted to the Executive Board for approval at its second regular session of 2001.

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children under 5 suffer from iron deficiency anaemia. Only 41 per cent of children are exclusively breastfed in the first month, the rate decreasing thereafter, and complementary feeding practices are often inappropriate.

3. With a population estimated by the Central Statistical Office at 3.6 million, subnational disparities continue to be a serious problem in Lebanon. The IMR in the Beqaa and South Lebanon are two to three times higher than in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Immunization coverage and the quality of maternal and child health services also vary widely within the country. The private sector dominates a large part of social services. Yet about half the population have no health insurance. Enrolment rates vary among regions: the high cost of education impedes access for poor families.

4. The quality of public sector social services remains an issue. Public health facilities are limited and offer a non-standardized package of services. In public primary schools, repetition rates (28 per cent) and drop-out rates (24 per cent) are respectively five times and twice those in private schools. Almost two thirds of pre-school and early childhood care institutions do not have the required licensing and skilled staff.

5. The juvenile justice system suffers from prolonged judiciary procedures (averaging 11 months) and from limited rehabilitation and re-education opportunities. Child labour is a problem: of those 10 to 14 years of age, some 5 per cent of boys and 2 per cent of girls are working. Most of them, having left school early, are unskilled and functionally illiterate. The minimum legal age for work is 14 years, but education is free and compulsory only up to 12 years. About 2 per cent of those under 18 are disabled; more than half of these disabilities are preventable. Some 20 per cent of school-age children are classified as slow learners or have minor learning difficulties.

6. Youth represent an important potential force in Lebanon's reconstruction process. But they also face challenges linked to lifestyles, educational quality and relevance, and their role and participation in public life. Gender equity is still lacking in such areas as legislation, employment, income generation and participation in political and public life.

7. The recent withdrawal of Israeli forces from South Lebanon and the West Beqaa will require major reconstruction and rebuilding of services, re-integration of the population, and creation of employment and development opportunities.

8. In 1998, Lebanon carried out a Common Country Assessment (CCA), and the CCA report has been updated on a yearly basis. Thematic groups meet and work together regularly. Work on a United Nations Development Assistance Framework has started and is expected to be complete by the end of 2000.

Lessons learned from past cooperation

9. The mid-term review (MTR) acknowledged the role of UNICEF in contributing to the achievement of national goals for children, in raising the level of awareness of child rights, and in mobilizing resources for children from a wide range of partners. UNICEF interventions at grass-roots level, especially in the underserved regions, contributed to national capacity-building at peripheral level. Such interventions and field presence have also allowed UNICEF to maintain an

emergency preparedness that has proved valuable in the most recent crisis. Given the high levels of social development in Lebanon, UNICEF contributions to national achievements have been of a catalytic nature. The health programme provided procurement services for vaccines and essential drugs, and contributed to capacity-building of service personnel. In education, strong advocacy led to the issuance of the free and compulsory education (FCE) law. The programme also supported various initiatives and studies for improving education quality and access. Advocacy based on studies of child labour led in 1998 to the first national strategy for child labour in Lebanon. In cooperation with several partners, the programme provided educational opportunities to working children in one rural and five urban areas, and initiated a system to update information on working children. Work on juvenile delinquency included support to training of personnel and rehabilitation of young detainees.

10. MTR and evaluation findings indicate the need to change the vertical approach in health to a more integrated strategy; reduce burcaucratic layers and high administrative costs in education interventions; set less ambitious objectives; and improve coordination between partners. Child protection interventions need to address problems related to weak institutions, poor enforcement of child labour laws, the gap between the legal age for working and the compulsory school attendance age, and the issue of working girls. The programme also needs to give more attention to strengthening institutional capacities for producing gender-disaggregated data, and monitoring the application of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Proposed country programme strategy

11. The programme of cooperation will promote the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; address disparities and promote equity in the situation of children and women; and contribute to ensuring a positive and active role for youth in Lebanese society. This will be done through providing input to policies and legislation based on studies, research and field experience; supporting interventions that benefit the most vulnerable groups, which in turn will inform the policy dialogue; creating and strengthening partnerships, especially with youth, the private sector, civil society organizations and other United Nations agencies; and strengthening institutional capacities for monitoring the implementation of the two Conventions. The programme of cooperation will comprise four programmes, three based on the life cycle of the Lebanese child, and the fourth supporting the other three.

12. The *child care and development programme*, benefiting children under six years of age and pregnant and lactating mothers, has four components: support to the Government in sustaining the World Summit goals, through monitoring, research, advocacy, technical support and procurement services; collaboration with partners in the development and application of policies and norms that promote equity and quality of maternal and child health services, with a focus on the most vulnerable groups; improvement of child care in pre-school institutions, and use of programme experience in the Better Parenting Initiative to promote parental and community education in health, nutrition and psychosocial care practices (including promotion of breastfeeding, proper complementary feeding practices, and the

implementation of the International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes); and support to national efforts to eliminate iodine deficiency disorders, mainly through monitoring support, and to control iron deficiency anaemia, through a comprehensive approach including fortification, supplementation and health and dietary education.

13. The *learning programme*, for children aged 6 to 13, will contribute to national efforts to provide access for all to a quality basic education, including for the poorest; and to improve retention, as a preventive strategy for tackling child labour. Through studies, operational research and policy dialogue with partners, UNICEF will promote the application and monitoring of the FCE law and the extension of this law up to age 15, to close the gap with the minimum working age. Working with partners in ongoing education reform, UNICEF will promote measures and policies to improve education quality and reduce drop-out rates in public schools. The programme will also support the elimination of gender stereotypes and strengthen counselling systems in public schools, the latter through equipping teachers and counsellors with skills to identify and deal with potential drop-outs. UNICEF will work with partners to improve the existing capacity of referral centres for children at risk, including those with learning difficulties.

14. The *youth empowerment and protection programme*, for ages 14 to 18, will contribute to providing youth with skills and knowledge for the future. This will be done through supporting operational research to identify priorities and actions; promoting policies and plans specific to youth; and building partnerships with government, non-governmental and private sector partners and the International Labour Organization to create development opportunities for youth. Particular attention will be given to youth living in disadvantaged areas, at-risk youth, and girls who have dropped out of school. The programme will support the development of "second chance learning" modules for out-of-school youth, and the training of youth trainers on such risks as smoking, injuries and HIV/AIDS.

15. The *promotion of children's and women's rights programme* will promote the application and monitoring of the two Conventions, with particular attention to improving gender statistics. This will be done through training to strengthen national institutional capacities, interpersonal communication for behaviour change, and public education and information through the mass media. Support will be given to the relevant ministries for a national centre for information on children, capable of collecting and disseminating regular reports on the situation of Lebanese children and women.

16. The country programme will contribute to the reconstruction and development process in South Lebanon and the West Beqaa, through intensifying programme activities in these regions and undertaking activities tailored to fit local needs, while taking into account new developments. Depending on the availability of additional resources for the south, UNICEF will also contribute to raising awareness on landmines; increasing access to safe water and sanitation as part of the child-care and development programme; and expanding interventions specifically designed for disadvantaged groups in these regions.

17. Based on objectives, key results expected, and their indicators, an integrated monitoring and evaluation plan will be developed, implemented and updated annually.

18. The cross-sectoral costs will be used to provide high-quality technical expertise in a range of crosscutting programme areas, drawn from universities, policy and research institutes, and other centres of excellence.

Estimated programme budget

Estimated programme cooperation, 2002-2006[a]

(In thousands of United States dollars)

	Regular resources	Other resources	Total
Child care and development	971	1 275	2 246
Learning	488	850	1 338
Youth empowerment and protection	727	1 700	2 427
Promotion of children's and women's rights	242	425	667
Cross-sectoral costs	607	750	1 357
Total	3 035	5 000	8 035

[a] These are indicative figures only which are subject to change once aggregate financial data are finalized.